

United in Loss

Best friends make a chilling discovery: Their daughters may have had the same killer

Mildred White and Jerri Johnson had been best friends for years. Living just a few miles from each other in Los Angeles, they both loved bowling and shared a passion for clothing and shopping. "We always had a sister-sister relationship," says Johnson. "We had that closeness." Then a seemingly singular tragedy 17 years ago—White's daughter Annette Ernest, 26, was raped and strangled to death near her L.A. neighborhood—drew the two women more tightly together. The unsolved murder was a shattering event. But six years later the unimaginable happened: Johnson's daughter Andrea Tripplett, 29, was killed in the same way, also in L.A. Suddenly the bond between the mothers grew deeper still. "Millie was there with me," says Johnson, 64, a retired accountant. "It's easier to be with somebody who knows what you're going through."

Ever since, there had been nothing to connect the crimes except the shared grief of the two old friends. But on Oct. 23, police in Los Angeles made the stunning announcement that they had evidence that White's and Johnson's daughters had been murdered by the same man. The suspect, Chester Dewayne Turner, 38, was also implicated in the killing of 10 other women, making him one of the most prolific serial killers in the city's history. When Johnson and White had their first conversation sharing the

DNA Analysis Links Inmate to 12 Slayings

The victims were all women, their bodies found mostly in one South L.A. swath. The accused is serving time in state prison for rape.

By ANDREW H. KATZ
Illustration by JAMES H. HARRIS

A woman's blood-soaked body was found in a trash can in a rooming house in South L.A. in 1981. The body was found after police had been looking for it for days. It was the first of 12 women whose bodies were found in the same area.













The Area's police department that found the bodies. The police found the bodies in the same area. The police found the bodies in the same area. The police found the bodies in the same area.



SUSPECT Chester Dewayne Turner, 38, is charged with the killing of 12 women in Los Angeles.

"Never in our wildest dreams did we think there was a connection," says Jerri Johnson (right, with Mildred White) of suspect Chester Dewayne Turner (inset), who has been charged in the separate murders of their daughters.

A GRITTY CORRIDOR THAT BECAME A MURDERER'S ROW

 Feb. 3, 1998 630 W. 6th St.	 April 6, 1998 500 So. Gladys Ave.
 April 2, 1993 7812 So. Figueroa St.	 May 16, 1993 6821 Estrella Ave.
 REGINA WASHINGTON Sept. 23, 1989 8858 So. Figueroa St.	 Feb. 12, 1995 532 W. 80th St.
 Dec. 16, 1992 9714 So. Figueroa St.	 Nov. 6, 1996 9611 So. Broadway
 Nov. 16, 1992 419 W. 98 St.	 DIANE JOHNSON March 9, 1987 10217 So. Grand Ave.
 ANITA FISHMAN Jan. 20, 1989 9819 So. Figueroa St.	 ANNETTE ERNEST Oct. 29, 1987 Grand Ave. & 106th St.

news, all White, a former postal worker, could blurt out was a disbelieving, "The same guy?" Says LAPD Det. Cliff Shepard, who helped crack the case: "It's bizarre. The two victims running into Chester—you would probably have a better chance of a meteor hitting you on the head."

Until recently, police had no inkling that they might be dealing with a serial killer. Almost all of Turner's 12 alleged victims were murdered along a 30-block stretch of Figueroa St., but over a period of 11 years, between 1987 and 1998. What's more, that section of Figueroa is a gritty strip rife with prostitutes and drug addicts, where violent crime has long been endemic.

White's daughter Annette, a mother of two young children, was out visiting friends on the evening of Oct. 29, 1987, when she was attacked and killed. "She was everybody's friend," says her mother. "Annette never met a stranger." Of all White's friends, John-

son seemed to take Annette's death the hardest. "It was like a piece of me was gone too," says Johnson. "She was a sweet person."

White, whose husband had died in 1982, took on the task of raising her daughter's two children, with Johnson's moral support. "We always would embrace each other with a kind of gladness," says White. But six years later it was Johnson who found herself in need of support. Her daughter Andrea, five months pregnant and the mother of two, was running an errand on the evening of April 1, 1993, and early the next morning her body was found, raped and strangled, behind a vacant building. When Johnson was told the news at work, she collapsed. "I screamed so loud that the whole building came to see what was wrong," she says. "I was going to drive home, but when I tried to walk out of my cubicle at the M.T.A., I fainted."

In both cases police said they had no

clues. But in that same year, authorities did manage to arrest a janitor named David Jones in the killing of three other women whose bodies had been found strangled in the Figueroa area. The evidence against Jones was fairly slim. Body fluids recovered from the victims suggested a killer with a different blood type. But Jones, a convicted rapist with the mental capacity of a 5-year-old, confessed. "He talked himself into it," says Detective Shepard. "He gave up a lot of information. He made some admissions about knowing the victims and choking them." Ultimately Jones was convicted and sentenced to life for the murders.

At the time, Johnson and White had no reason to believe that Jones had played a role in the murder of either of their daughters. And both were busy with the difficult job of raising their grandchildren. "We had to become mothers all over again," says Johnson. "But we had issues that most mothers

Cold Case

don't, because these kids had a scar, a deep wound that will never heal." White agrees. "I didn't have much time to be brooding and this and that over it, even though it hurt my heart so badly," she says. "I had to go to work and take care of these children."

Meanwhile, the police were hard at work as well. In 2001 the LAPD formed the Cold Case Homicide Unit to reexamine some of the 9,000 unsolved murders dating back to 1960, mainly using the latest DNA techniques. Two of the original officers assigned to the unit were Detective Shepard and his partner, Det. Jose Ramirez. For three years Shepard had been thinking about one of his own unsolved cases, that of Paula Vance, who had been found murdered in 1998 in downtown Los Angeles. When he and Ramirez submitted DNA samples for testing from Vance and another 1996 murder victim, the results from both pointed to Chester Turner, a former pizza delivery man. Turner, who had a history of only petty crimes, had been convicted in September 2002 of rape, which finally put his profile into a DNA database. The officers realized that they might have more than just isolated killings on their hands. "The adrenaline starts flowing," says Ramirez. "Now you have this one guy linked to two murders where the victims were strangled that occurred at different time periods."

Given the fact that Turner had once lived and worked in the Figueroa area, the detectives decided to concentrate their investigation there. As likely possibilities started to pop up, the DNA evidence was dug out of storage and sent along to the laboratory to be compared with Turner's profile. "We'd call our lab and say, 'Would you take a look at this?'" recalls Shepard. "A month or so later we'd get an answer: 'Yeah, it's him.'" In all, over the past two years they have managed to link Turner to 12 killings (so far he has been charged in 10 of the cases). Among the victims were Annette Ernest and Andrea Tripplett. The investigators still don't have a fix on how Turner allegedly



chose his prey, who ranged in age from early 20s to late 40s. Says Ramirez: "They were just victims of opportunity." The detectives visited the hulking 6'7", 250-lb., soft-spoken Turner in prison and came away as puzzled as they were before over his motives. "You don't run across these people every day," says Shepard. "We don't know what sets him off—we may never know."

In the process, the detectives uncovered evidence that appeared to finger Turner for the crimes for which Jones had been convicted. In March, Jones was released from prison after serving 11 years. "He doesn't even understand why he's not in prison," says his attorney Gigi Gordon. "We're talking about a dim 5-year-old." Meanwhile, the police, who were in the process of notifying the families of the dead women, had no way of knowing about the connection between White and Johnson. Indeed, the link came to the two mothers' attention almost by accident. On Oct. 22, Johnson got a call

she had never thought she would receive. The cops had found the man who had killed Andrea. "I was ecstatic," says Johnson. "I thought they were calling a press conference because they had solved an 11-year-old murder. Serial killer never came to my mind."

The next day Johnson's brother-in-law saw in the newspaper that Turner was accused of killing a slew of women. He started reading off the names. When she heard him say "Annette," she froze, remembering that was White's daughter's name. She immediately phoned White, whom police had not yet contacted. Johnson said to her, "Sit down, Millie." In the days afterward the two friends spent hours going over the what-ifs and the what-could-have-beens. "This has strengthened what we share," says Johnson. "We already had this bond, because we had the same scar in our heart."

By Bill Hewitt, Oliver Jones and Lyndon Stambler in Los Angeles

On January 26, 1987 Chester Dewayne Turner was arrested for assault with a firearm. There was not enough evidence to convict him and he was set free. His DNA was not taken. He was arrested a total of 21 times before he was convicted of a charge that resulted in DNA being taken. In 2002 he was convicted of rape, and his DNA was taken. It matched the DNA evidence found on twelve rape and murder victims. The first was murdered in March of 1987, less than two months after his January 26, 1987 arrest.

Had Chester Turner's DNA been taken when he was arrested on January 26, 1987, it is probable that eleven of his victims would still be alive.

Murders linked by DNA to Chester Dewayne Turner:

1. Diane Johnson – March 9, 1987
2. Annette Ernest – October 29, 1987
3. Anita Fishman – January 20, 1989
4. Regina Washington – September 23, 1989
5. Debra Williams – November 16, 1992
6. Mary Edwards – December 16, 1992
7. Andrea Triplett – April 2, 1993
8. Desarae Jones – May 16, 1993
9. Natalie Price – February 12, 1995
10. Mildred Beasley – November 6, 1996
11. Paula Vance – February 3, 1998
12. Brenda Bries – April 6, 1998

These are not merely names. They are daughters. Some are mothers. All were loved. Eleven families would have been spared the pain of having a loved one raped and murdered.

To make matters worse, a man named David Jones was wrongfully convicted of three of these murders and served eleven years in prison for crimes he did not commit. He has since been released.

Arrest record of Chester Dewayne Turner:

1. 1985 LAPD Charge: Force- Great Bodily Injury Likely- Victim unavailable- charges dismissed
2. 1986 LAPD Charge: Force- Great Bodily Injury Likely- Victim unavailable-charges dismissed
3. 1986 LAPD Charge: Force- Great Bodily Harm Likely- Dismissed
4. 1987 Inglewood PD Charge: Force- Great Bodily Harm Likely- Dismissed
5. 1987 LAPD Charge: Assault with Firearm on Person- Dismissed
6. 1988 LAPD Charge: Obstruct/Resist Officer-Dismissed
7. 1991 LAPD Charge: Force-Great Bodily Injury Likely -Pleas to lesser charge of Battery 20 days in jail
8. 1991 LAPD Charge: Probation Revocation 10 days jail
9. 1992 LAPD Charge: Probation Revocation- Probation reinstated
10. 1995 Probation modified- Unk. further
11. 1991 LAPD Charge: Receiving known stolen property 36 mo probation- 50 days jail
12. 1995 Probation revoked- 16 months prison
13. 1991 Disorderly conduct, Solicit lewd act- 60 days jail-36 mo probation
14. 1992 LAPD Charge: Indecent exposure, Disorderly Conduct, Solicit Lewd Act, Resist Public Officer- Probation 15. 1994 Salt Lake City PD Charge: Burglary, Assault, Resisting, Interfering- Decline to prosecute.
16. 1995 LAPD Disorderly Conduct, Solicit Lewd Act, Vehicle Theft, Inflict Injury on spouse - All dismissed except Vehicle Theft17.
- 1996 LAPD Charge: Transport, sell narcotics
18. 1996 Compton PD Charge: Possess Narcotics- 36 mo probation
19. 1997 Probation Revoked - 16 mo prison
20. 1997 Compton PD Charge: Obstruct/Resist Executive Officer, Firefighter Great Bodily Harm, Cruelty to animals- Prison21.
- 1997 Probation Revocation Possess Narcotic in prison, resist executive officer
22. 2000 LAPD Jail- charge: Rape Dismissed by prosecutor for revocation of parole
23. 2002 LA Central- 7 counts rape- 8 years prison
24. 2002 Delano Corrections Charge: Rape, Sexual Penetration W/Force

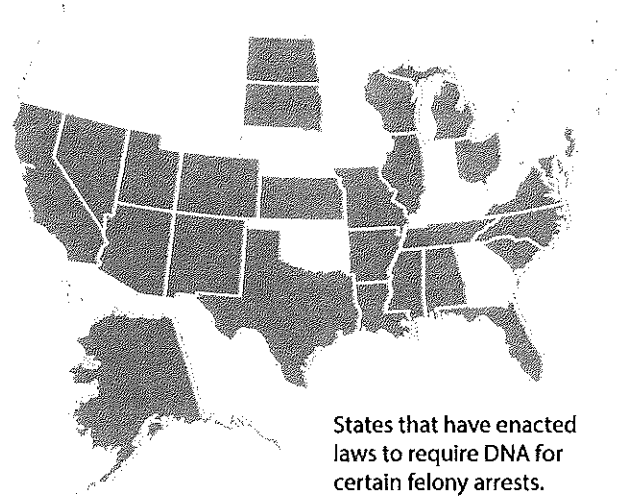
Why pass arrestee DNA laws?

28 STATES

COLLECT DNA FROM FELONY ARRESTS

All 50 states participate in CODIS, the national DNA. So far, 28 States have expanded their ability to solve and prevent crimes by including DNA collected from felony arrests.

The Katie Sepich Enhanced DNA Collection Act is a federal law that incentivizes States to collect DNA from felony arrestees. The Act authorizes grants to States through 2015 to support implementation costs of arrestee DNA laws.



States that have enacted laws to require DNA for certain felony arrests.

Over **300** individuals
have been exonerated using DNA

In the 2013 case, *Maryland v. King*, the US Supreme Court ruled that:

DNA TESTING is like fingerprinting

The US Supreme Court has ruled that requiring a forensic DNA sample upon felony arrest does not violate rights guaranteed by the 4th Amendment of the US Constitution. Specifically, the court stated that requiring a DNA sample from an individual arrested for a felony is a reasonable and legitimate police booking procedure, similar to fingerprinting or photographing.

DNA IDENTIFICATION is a reasonable search

DNA fingerprinting serves “a well-established, legitimate government interest: the need of law enforcement officers in a safe and accurate way to process and identify persons and possessions taken into custody.”

Maryland v. King, 569 U.S. (2013)



Like a fingerprint, forensic DNA profiles contain only what is necessary to identify an individual.

GENETIC PRIVACY concerns are misplaced

- A forensic DNA profile does not reveal genetic traits or private information
- Statutory and regulatory protections exist, and can be strengthened, to ensure samples are not misused or otherwise tested for other purposes

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To learn more, go to DNAsaves.org



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